

Message Text

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UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 3 BANGKOK 22370

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SUBJ: THAI STATEMENT ON RELATIONS WITH LAOS

1. SUMMARY FOLLOWING IS EMBASSY TRANSLATION OF TEXT OF THE RTG OCTOBER 21 STATEMENT ON RELATIONS WITH LAOS. COMMENTS FOLLOW SEPTEL. END SUMMARY

2. MR. NITSAI WETCHACHIWA, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE INFORMATION DEPARTMENT, MFA, TOLD THE PRESS ON OCTOBER 21, 1975, ON THE SUBJECT OF THAI-LAO RELATIONS THAT:

"THE FIRST AND IMPORTANT ISSUE THAT NEEDS TO BE REAFFIRMED IS THAT THE MFA BELIEVES AND HAS ALREADY STATED THAT NO OTHER COUNTRY EXCEPT LAOS ITSELF BEARS GOOD AND FRIENDLY INTENTIONS TOWARD THAT COUNTRY MORE THAN THAILAND DOES, FOR BOTH COUNTRIES HAVE ALWAYS HAD CLOSE NATIONAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL TIES. THE LAOTIAN LEADERS ARE WELL AWARE OF THE FACT THAT THAILAND HAS ALWAYS ASSISTED LAOS IN ITS FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE, SINCE THE TIME THAT IT WAS UNDER FRENCH RULE UNTIL IT ACHIEVED ITS INDEPENDENCE, AND THAILAND INTENDS TO CONTINUE GIVING COOPERATION

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AND SUPPORT UNMATCHED BY ANY COUNTRY.

"THE GIST OF THE THAI GOVERNMENT'S UNCHANGING POLICY TOWARD THE KINGDOM OF LAOS CAN BE SUMMED UP AS FOLLOWS. THAILAND WISHES TO BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR OF LAOS AND WILL SUPPORT THE LAO INTENTION TO MAINTAIN ITS NEUTRALITY, HAVE FULL INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNLY. FURTHERMORE, THAILAND WILL RENDER TECHNICAL AND CULTURAL ASSISTANCE TO LAOS IN DEVELOPING HER KINGDOM.

"IN ORDER TO MAKE SUCH A POLICY MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN IT HAS BEEN IN THE PAST, THE THAI HAVE TRIED EVERY MEANS TO CONTACT AND EXCHANGE IDEAS WITH THE LAO. AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LAO COALITION GOVT, MR. CHARUNPHAB ITSARANGKUN NA AYUTHAYA, THE FOREIGN MINISTER, LED A THAI DELEGATION TO VISIT THE KINGDOM OF LAOS AT ITS INVITATION AT THE END OF 1974. THE THAI DELEGATION MET AND EXCHANGED VIEWS WITH MANY LEADERS OF THE LAOTIAN GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA, PRINCE SOUVANNAVONG AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER PHANGA PHOUMI VONGVICHIT. DURING THE CONSULTATIONS BOTH SIDES EXPRESSED THEIR INTENTION TO STRENGTHEN TIES BETWEEN LAOS AND THAILAND AND TO COOPERATE IN EVERY WAY TO END MUTUAL PROBLEMS, ESPECIALLY PROBLEMS EXISTING ALONG THE COMMON BORDER, PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE TRANSPORTING OF GOODS THROUGH THAILAND TO LAOS, AS WELL AS THOSE IN THE ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND TECHNICAL FIELDS. FURTHER, THE THAI DELEGATION PROPOSED, IN THE NAME OF THE THAI GOVERNMENT, ASSISTING LAOS IN ALLEVIATING THAT COUNTRY'S SHORTAGES OF EDIBLE COMMODITIES, MEDICINES, AND CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS, FOR THAILAND CONSIDERS THIS URGENTLY REQUIRED IN THE LAO RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM. AT THE SAME TIME THE THAI DELEGATION PROPOSED THE FORMATION OF A THAI-LAO COMMITTEE ON A MINISTERIAL LEVEL, WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER AS CHAIRMAN ON THE THAI SIDE. THE COMMITTEE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSIDERING MATTERS WHICH DEAL WITH RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THIS MOVE IS CONSIDERED AN IMPORTANT STEP IN STRENGTHENING THE TIES BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS. AT THE SAME TIME THAILAND INVITED DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUMI VONGVICHIT TO VISIT THAILAND, AND SUGGESTED THAT THE JOINT THAI-LAO COMMITTEE HOLD ITS INAUGURAL MEETING IN BANGKOK, WHICH THE LAO GOVERNMENT ACCEPTED IN PRINCIPLE SHORTLY THEREAFTER.

"THE FIRST THAI-LAO JOINT MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE WAS HELD
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AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN BANGKOK IN JANUARY 1975. THE LEADER OF THE LAOTIAN DELEGATION TO THIS CONFERENCE WAS PHENG PHONGSAWAN, MINISTER OF INTERIOR AND PUBLIC WELFARE. THE LEADER OF THE THAI DELEGATION WAS MR. CHARUNPHAN ITSARANGKUN NA AYUTHAYA, THE FOREIGN MINISTER. THE CONFERENCE LASTED ONE WEEK, AND THE SUB-COMMITTEE CONSIDERED MATTERS DEALING WITH COOPERATION, SUCH AS THE PROJECT TO DEVELOP THE LAO ECONOMY, AS WELL AS IN THE FIELDS OF EDUCATION RELIGION, SPORTS, INFORMATION, AND THE

TRANSPORTATION OF GOODS THROUGH THAILAND. MORE SPECIFICALLY, THE THAI SIDE AGREED TO THE NEW LAO PROPOSAL TO PERMIT LAOS TO CHOOSE WHO WOULD BE PERMITTED TO ENGAGE IN TRANSPORTING GOODS ACROSS THE BORDER. BOTH SIDES ALSO AGREED TO CONSIDER JOINTLY AND SPECIFY THE STANDARDS AND CONDITIONS IN MAKING THE SELECTION AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS. THIS DECISION WAS MADE WITH THE INTENTION OF SOLVING PROBLEMS ON TARIFF RATES ON GOODS GOING THROUGH THAILAND, WHICH THE LAO REASONED WERE UNFAIR.

"CONCERNING THE SECURITY PROBLEM ON THE THAI-LAO BORDER, BOTH SIDES AGREED THAT CLOSE CONTACTED AND COOPERATION BETWEEN OFFICIALS OF BOTH SIDES SHOULD BE MAINTAINED ALONG THE BORDER TO FIND THE MEANS TO END SMUGGLING, CRIME, AND ILLEGAL ENTRIES. THE AGREEMENT WAS TO TAKE THE FORM OF A SWIFT EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION IN ORDER TO SUPPRESS WRONG-DOERS. BOTH SIDES JOINTLY AGREED TO STRENGTHEN DIRECT COOPERATION BETWEEN OFFICIALS OF BOTH GOVERNMENTS TO ACHIEVE BETTER RESULTS. FINALLY THEY AGREED TO HOLD THE NEXT THAI-LAO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN VIENTIANE AS PROPOSED BY THE LAO SIDE.

"IN ITS ATTEMPT TO CARRY OUT THE AGREEMENTS MADE AT THE CONFERENCE, THE THAI GOVERNMENT TRIED TO CONTACT THE LAO TO CONVENE ANOTHER MEETING IN VIENTIANE AS AGREED EARLIER, BUT TO NO AVAIL, DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER, MAJOR GENERAL CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN, PUBLICLY STATED THAT HE IS READY TO GO TO MEET WITH THE LAO AT ANY TIME. HOWEVER, THEIR ONLY OFFICIAL REPLY WAS THAT LAOS IS NOT READY TO HOLD A MEETING WITH THE THAI DUE TO THE FACT THAT EXISTING CONDITIONS IN THE KINGDOM OF LAOS ARE NOT CONDUCIVE TO HOLDING SUCH A HIGH LEVEL MEETING. THE THAI GOVERNMENT CONTINUED TO MAKE CONTACT THROUGH ITS EMBASSY IN VIENTIANE, AND THROUGH THE LAOTIAN EMBASSY IN BANGKOK, AND INDICATED THAT WHILE LAOS IS NOT READY TO HOLD A JOINT THAI-LAO MINISTERIAL MEETING, THAILAND WAS WILLING TO HOLD AN INFORMAL MEETING BETWEEN

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THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF BOTH COUNTRIES. HOWEVER, THE ANSWER FROM LAOS REMAINED THE SAME: LAOS IS NOT READY TO HOLD A MEETING, BE IT MINISTERIAL OR OTHERWISE.

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"BESIDES THE PGNU'S STAND ON THE ISSUE, THERE ARE OTHER STATEMENTS IN THE LAO AND FOREIGN PRESS TO THE EFFECT THAT A JOINT THAI-LAO MEETING CANNOT BE HELD UNTIL THAILAND 'INDICATES ITS SINCERITY' TO CONVINCE LAOS THAT THAILAND DOES NOT SUPPORT THE 'LAOTIAN REACTIONARIES' TO SUBVERT LAOS. IN THIS, THAILAND HAS BEEN UNFAIRLY ACCUSED OF CONDUCTING A TWO-FACED POLICY TOWARD LAOS IN REGARD TO ITS DEALING WITH THE REFUGEES FROM LAOS WHO ARE KNOWN AS 'REACTIONARY LAOTIANS,' EVEN THOUGH THAILAND HAS TAKEN SUCH MEASURES BASED ON SINCERITY AND ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS, ALWAYS BEARING IN MIND THAT THAILAND AND LAOS ARE BROTHER AND SISTER COUNTRIES AND ALSO FELLOW BUDDHISTS.

" THE FACTS CONCERNING THE REFUGEES FROM LAOS LIVING IN THAILAND AT PRESENT ARE AS FOLLOWS. SINCE THE POLITICAL CRISIS IN LAOS AT THE END OF APRIL, 1975, REFUGEES HAVE BEEN COMING FROM LAOS INTO THAILAND IN LARGE NUMBERS. MOST OF THE REFUGEES ARE MEO WHO MADE THEIR HOMES NEAR THE THAI BORDER. BESIDES THE MEOS ARE BLACK THAIS AND LAO EX-POLITICIANS. IN THE BEGINNING THERE WERE OVER 30,000 REFUGEES FROM LAOS, OVER 25,000 OF WHOM WERE MEO. THE NUMBER OF THE REFUGEES HAS SINCE INCREASED AND AT PRESENT HAS REACHED ALMOST 50,000. WHEN ONE ADDS THIS NUMBER TO THE AP-UNCLASSIFIED

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PROXIMATELY 20,000 REFUGEES FROM CAMBODIA, AND ANOTHER 2,000 FROM SOUTH VIETNAM, IT CAN BE SEEN THAT THAILAND IS FACED WITH AN IMMENSE TASK CONCERNING THE REFUGEE PROBLEM, EVEN THOUGH THAILAND HAD NO PART IN CREATING SUCH A PROBLEM.

"THOSE WHO ARE FAIR-MINDED AND CLOSELY WATCH THIS SUBJECT

ARE AWARE THAT THAILAND HAS NOT BEEN COMPLACENT IN DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM WHICH COULD BE CAUSED BY LAO MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THE REFUGEE PROBLEM. THAILAND TRIED TO CONTACT THE LAO GOVERNMENT TO SOLVE THE REFUGEE PROBLEM, BY SUGGESTING THAT IT APPOINT REPRESENTATIVES TO PERSUADE THE MEO TO RETURN TO THEIR FORMER HOMELAND IN LAOS. HOWEVER, LAOS REFUSED TO COOPERATE, STATING THAT THE PGNU HAS A CLEAR POLICY IN PERMITTING THE REFUGEES TO RETURN FREELY TO THEIR HOMELAND. NEVERTHELESS, MOST OF THE REFUGEES ARE AFRAID OF REPRISALS AND REFUSE TO RETURN HOME.

"THE RTG IS CONCERNED OVER GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS AND DOES NOT WANT TO HAVE THE ISSUE OF FORMER POLITICIANS AND PEOPLE FROM LAOS LIVING AS REFUGEES IN THAILAND TO BE A CAUSE OF MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CLOSE NEIGHBORS. THUS, IN CARRYING OUT ITS REFUGEE POLICY, THE RTG HAS FOLLOWED THESE GUIDELINES BASED ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS AND DESIGNED TO PREVENT MISUNDERSTANDING ON THE LAO SIDE:

1. THE RTG WILL PERMIT THE REFUGEES TO STAY IN THIS COUNTRY TEMPORARILY ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS AND REFUSES TO ALLOW ANY REFUGEE TO STAY HERE PERMANENTLY OUT OF FEAR THAT SUCH ACTION WOULD CREATE SUSPICION IN THE EYES OF THE PGNU.

2. THE RTG SUPPORTS AND ENCOURAGES THE REFUGEES COMING TO THAILAND TO GO TO OTHER COUNTRIES. THIS CAN BE SEEN IN THAILAND'S ATTEMPTS TO CONTACT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS THE UNHCR, ICEM, AND THE ICRC, TO HANDLE THE REFUGEES IN THAILAND. OVER 7,000 REFUGEES HAVE ALREADY LEFT THAILAND UNDER SUCH ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, AND MORE ARE BEING SENT OUT.

3. THE RTG TRIES TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE THE REFUGEES TO RETURN TO THEIR OWN COUNTRY. THE PGNU SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE THAI EFFORT TO COOPERATE WITH IT TO SEND LAO REFUGEES IN THAILAND BACK TO THEIR HOMELAND, WITH THE UNHCR ACTING AS COORDINATOR.

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4. AS REGARDS FORMER LAO POLITICIANS WHO ENTERED THAILAND TO SEEK ASYLUM, THAILAND HAS RESPONDED POSITIVELY TO THE LAO REQUEST THAT THEY LEAVE THAILAND. THIS CAN BE SEEN FROM THE THAI ANNOUNCEMENT THAT SIX LAO LEADERS WERE TO LEAVE THAILAND PROMPTLY, WITH THOSE WHOSE NAMES APPEARED ON THE LIST OF FORMER LAO POLITICIANS SUBJECT TO EXPULSION FROM THE COUNTRY. THIS INCLUDED SUCH PERSONS AS GENERAL VANG PAO, GENERAL KOU PRASIT ABHAI, AND TIAO NGON SANANIKONE, WHO HAVE ALREADY LEFT THAILAND OF THEIR OWN VOLITION. THOSE POLITICIANS REMAINING IN THAILAND ARE NOT KEY LEADERS, UNABLE TO FIND ANY COUNTRY FOR ASYLUM, OR A PERSON LIKE CHAO BOUN OUM WHO IS SO ILL THAT HE CANNOT ASSUME A POLITICAL ROLE.

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"BOTH LAOS AND THAILAND MUST BE JOINTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR TACKLING THE PROBLEM OF REFUGEES WHO FLED LAOS AND MUST FIND WAYS AND MEANS OF COOPERATION IN RESOLVING IT IN EARNEST. LAOS ITSELF SHOULD SEEK TO IMPROVE ITS INTERNAL SITUATION, WHICH HAS MADE REFUGEES FLEE INTO THAILAND, INSTEAD OF PURPOSELY CONDEMNING THE RTG FOR COLLUDING WITH THOSE REFUGEES TO CARRY OUT HOSTILE ACTION AGAINST LAOS. THE FOREGOING CHARGES ARE UNFOUNDED AND HAVE CONSTITUTED A STUMBLING-BLOCK TO THAI EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM. THE PGNU ITSELF HAS MORE OR LESS RECOGNIZED THIS FACT. FOR INSTANCE, THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE OFFICE OF THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES IN VIENTIANE ON SEPT. 19, 1975 CONCERNING THE PROBLEM OF LAO REFUGEES IN THAILAND STATED THAT:

"THE LAO GOVERNMENT HAS EXPLAINED TO THE UNHCR THAT LAO GROUPS NOW IN THAILAND HAVE BEEN FOOLED BY UNTRUE PROPAGANDA AND LEFT AFTER THE MAY, 1975, INCIDENT. THE UNHCR HAS KNOWN ABOUT IT.

' THE LAO GOVERNMENT AND THE UNHCR OFFICE CONCURRED IN THE VIEW THAT COORDINATION MUST BE MADE IN AN EFFORT TO SUPPORT THE FOREGOING PERSONS IN RETURNING TO THEIR COUNTRY IN COMPLIANCE WITH THEIR WISHES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, AND THERE MUST BE JOINT CON-

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SULTATION ON TECHNICAL WAYS AND MEANS OF REPATRIATING THEM.

' IN RESPONSE TO THE LAO GOVERNMENT'S WISHES, THE UNHCR IS READY TO COOPERATE IN FACILITATING THE SAID REPATRIATION TO THE LIMIT OF THE TARGET OF THE LAO GOVERNMENT, AND BY DEFRAYING JOINTLY EXPENSES FOR TRANSPORT AND LODGING FOR REPATRIATED PERSONS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.'

"THEREFORE, IF THE LAO SIDE COOPERATES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FOREGOING, THE PROBLEM OF LAO REFUGEES WILL BE READILY REVOLVED.

"APART FROM THE PROBLEM OF LAO REFUGEES, THE MEKONG RIVER IS ANOTHER POINT OF DISPUTE ON WHICH THE LAO SIDE HAS EXPRESSED ITS DISSATISFACTION OVER THE WORK OF THE THAI NO PO CHO (MEKONG RIVER PATROL) UNIT, SAYING THAT IT CONSTITUTED A CHALLENGE OR VIOLATION OF THE LAO TERRITORIAL WATERS. BUT, AS A MATTER OF FACT, PATROLLING OF THE MEKONG RIVER IS NECESSARY FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF THAI SECURITY, A SOVEREIGN RIGHT FOR EVERY STATE TO EXERCISE WITHIN ITS BORDERS.

"THE THAI POLICY OF PATROLLING ALONG THE MEKONG RIVER IS DESIGNED TO MAINTAIN SECURITY IN THAI-LAO BORDER AREAS AND TO PREVENT SMUGGLING. THE THAI SIDE HAS ADHERED TO THE PRINCIPLE OF PATROLLING IN THE THAI BORDER AREA, ONLY, INSTRUCTING THE AUTHORITIES CONCERNED TO REFRAIN FROM RETALIATING TO ANY ATTACK BY FORCE, EXCEPT FOR SERIOUS ONES, BECAUSE A THAI PATROL BOAT MAY FACE DANGER FROM GUNRUNNERS OR SMUGGLERS IF IT DOES NOT RETALIATE. THERE WAS NO DISPUTE OVER THIS IN THE PAST. IT IS A MATTER OF REGRET THAT IT HAS CROPPED UP SINCE THERE WAS A POLITICAL CHANGE IN LAOS AT THE END OF APRIL, 1975. CLASHES BETWEEN BOATS BELONG- TO THE MEKONG RIVER PATROL UNIT AND PERSONNEL ON THE LAO BANK HAVE OCCURRED AND INCREASED. MOST INCIDENTS RESULTED FROM AMBUSHES OF MEKONG RIVER PATROL UNIT BOATS. THE MEKONG RIVER PATROL UNIT FOUND IT NECESSARY TO TAKE ACTION FOR SELF-DEFENSE UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW. BUT THE ABOVE DIFFERENCES MAY TURN OUT TO BE A DISPUTE RESULTING FROM INTERNATIONAL MISUNDERSTANDING. THEREFORE, THE THAI SIDE HAS SUGGESTED THAT JOINT PATROLS BE CARRIED OUT IN AN EFFORT TO PREVENT MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND INTERNATIONAL CLASHES. THE LAO SIDE HAS NOT REPLIED. ON THE CONTRARY, IT HAS UTILIZED THE MASS MEDIA TO PUBLISH A SERIOUS ATTACK AGAINST THE

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FUNCTIONING OF THE MEKONG PATROL UNIT WITHOUT TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE COMMON INTERESTS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, OR EVEN THE FACT THAT A NEIGHBORING COUNTRY HAS TO USE THE SAME WATERWAY. HOWEVER,

THE PROBLEM OF THE MEKONG RIVER CAN ALSO BE RESOLVED IF THE TWO GOVERNMENTS CONDUCT NEGOTIATIONS THROUGH CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE, AND JOINT PATROL IS THE BEST WAY TO RESOLVE THE THAI-LAO PROBLEM ALONG THE MEKONG RIVER. IF THE LAO SIDE IS SINCERE IN SOLVING INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES ALONG THE MEKONG RIVER, IT SHOULD AGREE TO TALKS IN AN EFFORT TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ABOVE PRINCIPLES.

"THE ABOVE PROBLEMS BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS ARE APPARENTLY NOT SO DIFFICULT THAT THEY CANNOT BE RESOLVED BY HOLDING THAILAND RESPONSIBLE FOR IT ALONE. THE RTG HAS ALWAYS MADE IT CLEAR THAT IT IS READY TO COOPERATE WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF LAOS IN SOLVING THE ABOVE PROBLEMS, AND IT HAS SUGGESTED ALL ALONG THAT TALKS BE HELD TO DISCUSS THEM. THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAS SOUGHT TO INFORM THE LAOTIAN SIDE OF THAILAND'S ATTITUDE. ON OCTOBER 20, 1975, THE FOREIGN MINISTER SUMMONED THE LAOTIAN AMB PHYA ANOURAKRAJSENA AND INFORMED HIM OF THIS ATTITUDE ALONG WITH THAILAND'S PROPOSALS FOR THE SOLUTION OF COMMON PROBLEMS IN ORDER TO ENABLE THE LAO AMBASSADOR TO REPORT TO HIS GOVERNMENT FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION. THEREFORE, DEVELOPMENTS IN THIS MATTER HINGE ON THE RESPONSE OF THE LAO GOVERNMENT. IT IS HOPED THAT AFTER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER PHYA PHOUMI VONGVICHIT'S RETURN TO VIENTIANE, ARRANGEMENTS FOR A MINISTERIAL-LEVEL MEETING BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS WILL BE MADE SUCCESSFULLY SOON."

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